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TRICHOLIMNAS CONDITICIUS IS PROBABLY A SYNONYM OF *TRICHOLIMNAS SYLVESTRIS*

(Aves, Rallidae)

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Comparison of the type of *Tricholimnas conditicius* Peters and Griscom (Proc. New England Zool. Club, vol. 10, 1928, pp. 99-103) with a series of *Tricholimnas sylvestris* (Selater) makes it appear most probable that the type specimen is an immature female of *sylvestris*. Furthermore, some recently discovered notes in the handwriting of collector Andrew Garrett cast grave doubt upon the theory that Garrett shot the bird on Apaiang Atoll, between Makin and Tarawa, in the Gilbert Islands, as Thomas Barbour postulated in the original description of the supposed species. Both Mr. Peters and Mr. Griscom agree to this.

Naturalists have wondered since then whether a habitat, such as this low sandy island affords, could have supported a population of these rails. The very distance from congeners on New Caledonia and Lord Howe Island, off the coast of Australia, made this seem unlikely, quite apart from the disparity of habitats. However, the arguments brought forward in the original description were difficult to circumvent.

This type and only known specimen of *conditicius* was found preserved in alcohol in the Museum of Comparative Zoology after a period of long oblivion. With it was a label: "Kingsmill Islands, 1861, Andrew Garrett, Collector". Since it could be proved without question that Garrett was actually on Apaiang Atoll of the Kingsmill, or what is now called the Gilbert group, in the autumn of 1859, it seemed likely that he did collect the bird there and that the date "1861" represented the year of acquisition by the museum. However, it now seems quite

as probable that the specimen has been confused with a consignment of specimens that came from the Kingsmills and that the label was written in the museum under a misapprehension.

Andrew Garrett was a dealer who had in his stock specimens from all over the world. In a letter to Charles E. Hamlin at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, written on April 10, 1878, from Huahine, Society Ids., he says: "In return I shall be glad to receive any land or fresh water shells from the East Indies and marine shells from any part of the world except Eastern States, California, and Polynesia." And again, "You can send me in return for this box *everything* you can spare from your duplicates no matter from what part of the world . . . don't forget the museum publications for which I will send the ferns in compensation."

From Hilo, Hawaii, he writes on Oct. 10, 1856, that he plans a voyage on the whaler 'Lydia', the captain of which was an acquaintance of his.

In a letter to Jas. M. Barnard dated April 29, 1857, and written at Hilo, he gives a short history of his life. He had been a sailor and had visited in past years the "Ladrone, Bonin, Loochoo, some of the Australian and several of the East India Islands . . . my taste for Natural History, which I dearly love, was acquired while visiting foreign places."

The most important bit of evidence has recently been found. A short note in Andrew Garrett's handwriting and on the same paper used by him in his correspondence is entitled "Remarks upon the Birds of Apaiang one of the Kingsmills Is." and is reproduced here in its entirety. It bears no date but was probably written in 1859.

"During my short residence at the above location [Apaiang Atoll, Sept.-Oct. 1859] I collected one or two specimens of every bird I could get. As I had not time to prepare their skins, I packed them in alcohol. *There is only one species of land bird, and this I never saw but obtained one of its tail feathers which I send you. I think it is a species of Hawk.*" (Italics are mine.) Unfortunately this feather cannot be found. Two species of migrant hawks have been reported from the Palau Island; possibly a stray bird reached Apaiang.

Andrew Garrett was an excellent naturalist; Barbour has called him "an extraordinary genius." Although his interests were centered upon fishes and shells, he knew birds. In a contemporary list of birds, mammals of Hawaii, sent to the Museum of Comparative Zoology, he says, (no.) "7 — Phaethon — This fine bird builds its nests and roosts among the precipices bordering the sea in Hamakua and Hilo." He

then describes the bird accurately. And again, (no.) "3 — Fulica — common about our fresh water ponds." It is quite unlikely that he would consider *Tricholimnas* to be a sea bird. Nor is it likely that he would mistake the short, decomposed tail feather of *Tricholimnas* for that of a hawk.

Unfortunately there is no record of the actual provenance of the specimen but the weight of evidence points to its having come from Lord Howe Id. It is probable that it found its way into Andrew Garrett's collection by an exchange, or perhaps through the good offices of a whaling friend.

Further questions occur. Assuming that the type was a member of a population which had for some time inhabited Apaiang Atoll, why was it not found by the contemporaries of Garrett? The answer is that none of them visited the island. However, Kubary, Finsch and others did land upon islands of neighboring groups and no such specimen was recorded. No bird even faintly resembling this has ever been recorded except from Lord Howe Id. and New Caledonia. If the assumption is correct, we must presuppose that wind born or ship born individuals reached Apaiang and no other neighboring islands and that the population was extirpated a very short time after Garrett visited there. It would be strange if such a population had established itself on this flat, almost desert, island in view of the fact that its unmistakable relatives prefer forests and hills and that the intervening islands afford more suitable habitat. That it became extinct in a number of island groups during the twenty years 1860–1880 is not at all probable.

Granted that no proof can be offered and that at best we are dealing with probabilities, the best calculated guess would appear to be that the type of *Tricholimnas conditicius* came from Lord Howe Id.

No specimens of *sylvestris* were to be found in the United States in 1928 when *conditicius* was described. Comparison of the type with a series of twelve in the Rothschild collection, now in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, cause most of the characters ascribed to geographical variation to disappear. The paler crown, throat and underparts, the browner head and throat are doubtless the result of long immersion in alcohol and it is surprising that more color change has not taken place. The only differences are then the length of wing and bill, which are two millimeters shorter than those of the smallest female of *sylvestris* available. Since G. M. Allen, in the original description indicated that the skeleton was obviously that of

an immature bird, perhaps it may reasonably be assumed that this character is due to age.

Measurements, in millimeters, are as follows:

	<i>"conditicius"</i>	<i>sylvestris</i>	<i>lafresnayanus</i>
		♂	♀
Wing.....	132	135-139	133-142
Tail.....	58	58-63	61-65
Bill.....	45	54-56	47-50
Tarsus	47	47-50	43-48
			54

In the original description the length of the tail of the type of *conditicius* is said to be 68 mm. Mr. Peters agrees with me that it should read 58 mm.